

BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS**SPECIAL MEETING****Thursday, July 24, 2001****7:00 p.m.**

Present: June Bailey, Glen Dey, Janet Miller, M.S. Mitchell, Trix Niernberger, Leon Robinson, Joe Todd

Also Present: Phil Meyer – Baughman Co. PA
Jeff Bradley – Baughman Co. PA
Dan Wilson – Wilson Darnell Mann PA
John Brewer – Wilson Darnell Mann PA
Lee Engler – Wilson Darnell Mann PA
Steve Murillo - Artist

Doug Kupper and Maryann Crockett (staff)

President Mitchell called the meeting to order at approximately 7:00 p.m. In his opening statement he thanked the public for their attendance, introduced Park Board members and staff, and briefly reviewed the meeting agenda and public hearing etiquette.

Discussion of Riverside Park System Master Plan

Phil Meyer, Baughman Co. PA, began the presentation by introducing members of the design team from Baughman Co. PA, Wilson Darnell Mann PA and the artist. He commented that the design team was not hired to do a new master plan but to gather input and information regarding the proposed park design from various committees, interested parties, and City staff which included members of the Park and Recreation Department, Fire Department, Public Works Department, Engineering and Traffic Engineering.

Meyer said the team also developed an artistic concept for the overall park plan, and that a charette was presented to the District Advisory Boards (DABs), Design Council, and other citizen groups. He said after making a few adjustments to the plan based on comments and input received, the plan was then presented to the DABs, Design Council, Park Board, Riverside Citizens Association Park Use Task Force, Development Coordinating Committee and Audubon Society for final comment and review.

Meyer continued by explaining that the team discussed various themes for each park area as follows: Oak Park – an art park with emphasis on maintaining the wildlife habitat; Central Riverside – a family park with additional play areas and water feature; and Park Villa – a more formal park. He added that the team would also recommend that Murdock Street be closed and that Stackman Drive be turned into a two way street so that vehicular traffic could still move through the park. He said pedestrian traffic would also be addressed with the addition of more green space and walking/hiking and bicycle paths. He stated that Phase 1 of the project focused

strictly on Central Riverside Park. He said the team was really excited about the project and that Phase 1 would have tremendous community involvement and impact. He introduced Lee Engler from Wilson Darnell Mann PA.

Lee Engler referred to an architectural rendering of the proposed Central Riverside Park design. He pointed out the “round about” or traffic circle at the Murdock Street entrance to the park. He also mentioned incorporation of entrance columns and development of an icon or symbol that would represent the entire Riverside system. He stated that the team would use the same character of building used for Park Villa on all proposed construction and structures within the park. He said with the closure of Murdock Street, the entire park area could be used for various activities including an oval strolling path, gazebo, zero-depth water feature, plaza area, playground, additional walkways and pond.

Engler referred to the next gateway to the Park at Nims Boulevard. He said adjacent to the Nims Boulevard entrance there would be a large parking lot (near both the proposed run center and new stage area) that was centralized in an attempt to get people out of their cars and walking through the park. He mentioned the use of “grasscrete” which was concrete blocks planted with grass that could be used for additional parking for large events, but that reverted back to open green space when no cars were parked on it. He referred to creation of a plaza area, which would actually be the “heart” of the park with period lighting fixtures and other understated elements as well as the introduction of works of art.

Engler said the plan also included renovation of the Wichita Wild building into public restrooms that would be cleaner and more accessible to the public and removal of the wildlife exhibit. He commented that the exhibit animals could probably be moved to the Dillon Nature Center. He said they were also recommending that the Pagoda Building remain at its present location. He added that other amenities included new picnic tables, trash receptacles and grills. Engler concluded his presentation by briefly mentioning extension of the bike path under the North bridge above Murdock Street, construction of a new performance center West of Nims Boulevard (where the small stage is currently located), construction of a run center and removal of lower Stackman Drive. He introduced Steve Murillo, project artist.

Steve Murillo stated that four artists have contributed to the project since the beginning of the design process. He said they felt it was important to use naturalistic materials that would build into the land itself. He commented that the central portion of the park was basically the “heart” of the project, henceforth, the decision to recommend removal/closure of Murdock Street. He mentioned several art elements that would reflect the historic nature of the park and referred to artistic renderings or “figure walls” that would be included in the plaza area.

Phil Meyer concluded the presentation by stating that the design team felt that Riverside was a park for all ages and that their design reflected how all citizens could use the park. In addition, he said implementing art in the design would give the park a tremendous impact for the whole City.

Public Comment:

- Annie Best, 11th Street – stated that she has attended numerous meetings over the years regarding the Riverside Park System Plan. She said she was more interested in what can

be done with the \$4.2 million over the entire Riverside Complex, rather than focusing all the resources on Central Riverside Park as “Phase 1.” She commented on the amount of time it has taken to get to Phase 1 and said she was skeptical of Phase 2 ever being implemented. She also mentioned that closing Murdock Street might involve safety issues with regard to response times for ambulance and fire vehicles. (Engler clarified that the Fire Department had indicated that there would be a 5 second difference in response time if Murdock Street were closed.) She requested that the revised plan be presented to the neighborhood associations.

- Lucy Burtnett, 811 Wiley Street – said she attended a meeting last week where the RCA Park Users Task Force went over the Cost Summary and Cost Estimate line item, by line item to attempt to bring the plan back to the original concept that has been discussed over the past seven years. She said she was disappointed that not only had funds been cut from the project, but it also appeared that many of the items/amenities agreed upon for implementation seemed to be missing from the design presentation.
- 1138 N. Amidon – commented that as a bird watcher he was more interested in Oak Park. He said he was disappointed that none of proposed changes to Oak Park would be implemented under Phase 1 and that the water feature was in dire need of repair. He stated that the park was important for migratory birds and expressed concern about disturbing the park’s natural setting. He requested that recreation activities be kept in Central and South Riverside Parks.
- Joyce Lent, 1625 N. Charles – commented that she was a teacher for USD #259 working at the Great Plains Nature Center and Kansas Wildlife Exhibit. She stated that the animals at the Exhibit were a vital educational resource. She said although the Exhibit was small, the species were animals native to Kansas and the Exhibit was a very popular attraction at the Park.
- Pat Rogers, 808 Carter – said this was the first time she had heard anything about closing the Kansas Wildlife Exhibit and that she has never been to the park when people weren’t at the Exhibit observing the animals. She commented on closing Murdock Street, parking on the South side of Stackman Drive, and requested that the rocket not be removed from the park. She concluded by saying that she did not think people realized that this was only Phase 1 of the plan and requested that the plan be presented to the entire RCA for review and comment, not just the Park Use Task Force.

Director Kupper clarified that the purpose of the tonight’s meeting was to provide public comment and guidance to the design team on various elements of the proposed plan.

- Kathy Dittmer, 823 Litchfield – requested that a joint meeting be held with the Riverside Citizens Association, Historic Midtown Neighborhood Association, North Riverside Neighborhood Association and Delano Neighborhood Association. She made comments relative to the condition of the Oak Park pond, the parking lot at Park Villa and location of the playground equipment, closure of Murdock Street and turning Stackman Drive into a two-way street, whether the stage area needed to be replaced, the possible need for a park events coordinator and the need for additional park maintenance.

- Warren Potter, 1101 N. Forest – commented on the need to take immediate action on the Oak Park pond. He requested that other monies be used to fund the proposed artwork. He also expressed a safety concern regarding the depth of the proposed pond in Central Riverside Park.
- Harold Ott, 821 Litchfield – stated that he goes through the Park at least once a day via Murdock Street and would not like to see it closed. He stated that he liked most of the other items in the plan, but raised the issue of replacing the stage area and whether it would be used enough to justify the cost.
- Cheryl Miller, 21st and Woodlawn – made several comments relative to removal of Murdock Street, under utilization of the stage and amphitheater area, and renovation of Oak Park pond. She added that Oak Park was a prime nesting and habitat area for migratory birds. She also mentioned that the Kansas Wildlife Exhibit was housed in the same area as the old City Zoo and, therefore, she felt had historical value besides the fact that it was free to the public.
- Bill Reeser, 26th St. North – said he liked the idea of removing Murdock Street; however, he felt removing the zoo area would be too expensive and although maintaining the area did cost money, he didn't see where it had outlived its usefulness. He also commented on the possibility of seeking other funding sources for the walking/hiking paths.
- Steve Perry, 817 Wiley – said the Park Use Task Force (of which he was a member) came up with a list of projects they felt were viable. He also expressed skepticism regarding implementation of Phase 2 of the plan and remarked that other park areas also need renovation/improvements. He added that he liked the openness of the park design but added that he felt the additional walking paths could probably be funded through some other sources, such as state funds.
- Elizabeth Bishop, 8515 Longlake – asked several questions relative to the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) process. She said she wouldn't like to see other parks in the City pitted against Riverside for improvement funds.

Director Kupper briefly explained the CIP process commenting that it was a ten-year plan, which was reviewed/revise on an annual basis by the CIP Committee based on public hearings and other factors. He clarified that the Riverside project was not "competing" with other park projects.

- Harry Gregory, 1139 N. Amidon – asked about the project time line.

Director Kupper responded that the original plan was to try to begin construction in spring, 2002. He briefly reviewed the process including finalization of the design-build plan, letting bids for construction, etc. He commented that those items should be completed by January 2002, but if an additional meeting was required, the consultants may have to create a new time line. He said it appeared that the group was not going to reach a consensus at this meeting.

- Alan Fearey, 818 N. Carriage Parkway – commented that he felt the plan needed to be presented to the other neighborhood groups so they could buy into it.

Lucy Burtneett commented that the Kansas Wildlife Exhibit was on the plan presented to the Park Use Task Force. Kathy Dittmer said a lot of groups have spoken to the Park Board and Park and Recreation Department concerning the plan and that she felt many of the people who lived around the park would be willing to help garner support for the plan. Annie Best stated that the Park Use Task Force had cut the plan down to the bone and developed a priority list for consideration in an attempt to build consensus and support for the plan. Steve Perry asked for a commitment regarding park maintenance, which he said was atrocious. He said he'd be happy with an irrigation system and sufficient staff to maintain improvements, which he felt was not being done.

Responding to concerns regarding maintenance, Director Kupper indicated that there has been marked improvement in maintenance in the short nineteen months that he has been in Wichita. He said the City has recently hired two recreation and maintenance specialists and that the department was building a skilled, cohesive team to address maintenance concerns and funding issues during the budget process.

President Mitchell commented that the Park Use Task Force prioritized an itemized list for presentation at the Park Board meeting. He said one of the items discussed was the possible use of ISTEPA or TEA 2001 State funds for additional walking paths and hiking trails. There was brief discussion as to whether ISTEPA funds could be used for internal park paths. He said the committee also eliminated "big ticket items" such as the roundabouts, sculpture and art work. He said the committee also had questions regarding the high cost of several items such as the "grasscrete", concrete pavement, lake and other items. He also acknowledged that the group took into consideration that construction costs have increased tremendously since the plan was reviewed in 1993. He added that the group had a completely different way of looking at the whole Riverside project and that they would like to see the money spread throughout Central and North Riverside Parks as well as Oak Park. He said he would provide Wilson Darnell Mann a copy of the priority list. There was discussion concerning the Park Use Task Force meeting with the consultant to further develop the plan based on the priority list.

It was agreed that an additional public hearing would be held on Tuesday, September 7, 2001, at 7:00 p.m. at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, 1101 N. River Boulevard, to discuss the plan and obtain further public input.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at approximately 8:50 p.m.

M.S. Mitchell, President

ATTEST:

Maryann Crockett, Clerk
Recording Secretary